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PARANORMAL INVESTIGATIONS SHAPING YOUTH'S BELIEFS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Paranormal beliefs are superstitious beliefs. The media is broadcasting programs on television calming paranormal beliefs, and these programs are famous among the youth in Pakistan. This rationale provides a notion to look for paranormal investigation shows broadcasted on Pakistani television channels, shaping the youth's beliefs in Pakistan. This is a quantitative study and cross sectional survey designed is used. The data for this study was collected from the students of six universities in Lahore, in total 630 students with arts and science, through a structured questionnaire. The study results indicated a statistically significant association between watching paranormal content and the influence on the paranormal beliefs of youth in Pakistan. The paranormal belief is stronger for those having prior related experience. Whereas these beliefs are more common in girls as compared to boys. Furthermore, a difference in beliefs between science and art students also exists. Therefore, it is recommended that the mass media should take responsibility as youth accept paranormal claims without logical thinking. Future research should be conducted to investigate paranormal beliefs among religious and non-religious people watching paranormal investigation shows. A qualitative inquiry is recommended for more in-depth insights to generalize the investigating phenomenon.

Keywords: Paranormal, Ghost Investigation Shows, Pakistan, Television, Beliefs

Introduction

Media has all power to persuade a large audience (Mustafa, 2013). Among other mediums of media television caters more audience (Webster, 2005). The consumption of television influences the perception, attitude, and behavior of viewers easily (Arshad, Anam Hassan, 2014, Wilson, 2018) with a variety of content (i.e., news, entertainment, programs), to inspire an individual's lifestyle (Zia, 2007). Over the last few decades, there are many programs screened all over the world linked with paranormal beliefs (Teesdale, 2011; Halsey, 2020). Paranormal beliefs are associated with multiple definitions as, a personality type (Heard & Vyse, 1999), external locus of control (Groth-Mamat & Pegden 1998), psychological disturbance (Thalborbe, 1994), delusional fears (Lange, 1999), the skill of critical thinking (Morgan & Morgan, 1998) and a religious connotation (Stanke & Taylor, 2004). In brief, beliefs defying the scientific explanation are called paranormal beliefs (Pyysiäinen, 2008), and it is difficult to challenge them (Abbas, 2013). Baker & Joseph (2008) shared that supernatural and paranormal beliefs have gained attention globally. Reid (2006) highlighted that around 50% of the population in Canada, 46% in the US (Harris, 2014), 28% in the UK (YouGov, 2011), and 24% in Pakistan (Tribune, 2022) believe in ghost or the paranormal.

Brewer (2013) highlighted the media powder to shape paranormal beliefs, which doubled since 1990 (Pew Forum, 2009), and directly affecting the behavior and perception of people (Maller & Lundeen, 1932, as cited in Sparks and Millar, 2001). Safdar, Niazi & Adil (2019) highlighted a significant relationship of paranormal beliefs exist between external locus of control and religiosity, and, greater in rural people (Moore, 2005 and Farooq & Kiyani 2020). Aslam (2017) stated that mental illness, anxiety, or any sort of disease are the

crucial factors supporting paranormal beliefs in Pakistan. Abbas (2013) claimed that Pakistani people usually don't think critically and hardly look for evidence before believing paranormal phenomena. Farooq & Kayani (2020) found that people believe in paranormal and superstitious aspects owing to their personal experience, observations traditions, and or religiously mentioned existence of ghosts and black magic.

Paranormal investigations have become a common theme in the media (Teesdale, 2011). The programs showing supernatural paranormal phenomena received great popularity (Halsey, 2018 and Baker, 2008). Internationally there are many programs broadcasting, paranormal phenomenon (Halsey, 2020), with a rating of three to five million viewers (Fielding, Acorah, & Paul, 2005). Few programs are broadcast on the same theme in Pakistan with a good target rating point (TRP). The paranormal genre became popularized in Pakistan after the program *Wo kya hay?*, Pakistan's first paranormal investigation show. Along with it *Aseeb Zada*, *Undaikha Wajood*, *Aseeb*, *Raaz* broadcast on the screen. Eaton (2015) highlighted that ghosts show widely spreading supernatural beliefs. The ghost shows investigators use technical language, and logical and scientific devices, more likely to believe in paranormal reality Brewer (2012). Vinay (2017) found that electronic media is disseminating illogical, unscientific superstitious programs which plant superstitions in society. This paranormal genre is popular among youth (Brewer, 2013 and Garrett & Cutting, 2017). The present study assumes that if youth watch paranormal shows, the chance to influence their beliefs might be greater. This notion provides a rationale to probe into the matter and explore the paranormal influence on viewer screening ghost shows on media platforms.

In light of said narrative, there are a significant amount of international studies reporting that media can influence paranormal belief (Brewer, 2013; French & Wilson, 2007; Spark, Nelson & Campbell, 1997; Sparks et al., 1994; Sparks et al., 1997; Sparks et al., 2001; Irwin, 2009 and Wilson, 2018) but very few studies have found targeting paranormal investigation programs, influencing the paranormal beliefs of youth. The literature shows very little work has been conducted on the supernatural and paranormal genre in Pakistan. Further, there is no literature available on the internet regarding paranormal investigation shows in Pakistan. Moreover, there is a large amount of literature published on media violence and this density has produced a gap in understanding the other kind of media effects (e.g. paranormal genre). Thus, the study has a strong rationale based on previous literature that little work is present on the paranormal genre in Pakistan and as per the authors' knowledge no relevant literature is available regarding paranormal investigation shows through Pakistani television. So, the current study aims to analyze the opinion of youth regarding paranormal beliefs influencing youth behavior.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are the following;

1. To find out the viewership patterns of youth watching paranormal investigations.
2. To find the youth's opinion regarding targeted shows.
3. To analyze the influencing beliefs of youth regarding paranormal investigation shows through Pakistani channels.

Research Question

The following research question will be addressed to meet the objectives of this scientific inquiry;

1. To what extent does exposure to paranormal investigation shows through

television influences the beliefs of youth (Lahore)?

Hypothesis

The two major hypotheses are designed for the study. 1st hypothesis aimed to know the association between paranormal watching and the influence of paranormal investigation shows while the second was to test the resonance (hypotheses of cultivation theory).

H1: Greater the exposure to paranormal investigation shows on Pakistani television, the Greater the influence on the beliefs of youth.

H2: The influence on beliefs would be stronger for individuals, who have personal experience paranormal events in past.

Sub hypotheses

- Viewing paranormal investigation shows has more influence on the beliefs of girls than boys.
- Viewing paranormal investigation shows has more influence on the beliefs of art students than students of sciences.

Methodology

This is a quantitative study conducted using a cross-sectional survey to investigate paranormal beliefs shaping youth behavior in Pakistan. A structured questionnaire was developed by reviewing previous/related research and submitted to a panel of experts in the field for review. The final questionnaire consists of forty questions including six screener items, three demographic items, and twenty-five scale items. The purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. The study sample size was 630 taken from six universities in Lahore. Lahore city is purposively selected because it is the traditional capital city of Punjab, Pakistan, and an urban center. It is the second largest and most cosmopolitan city in Pakistan. Lahore College for Women University, Queen Mary College University of Punjab, Government

College University Lahore, National University of Modern Languages, Kinnaird College University and, University of Central Punjab were selected for data collection.

A sample size of 100 youth members (male and female) was collected from each selected university in a total of 315 boys and 315 girls respectively. Further, the study participants were segregated into boys/girls in the science category and arts category. The youth as study participant is selected because paranormal beliefs are more prominent in youngsters (Gallup Poll, 2005; Irwin, 1993 and Irwin, 2004) and it has been observed that this genre (horror) is popular among young girls and boys (Garrett and Cutting 2017), which is significant to provide the deep insights of the investigating phenomenon. This research survey was personally administered by the researchers and research ethics were ensured. The returned questionnaires were assigned numbers for careful screening and completeness of the information. The questionnaire statements were measured on a five-point Likert scale (i.e. strongly agree=5, agree=4, Neutral=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1).

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The whole data were screened carefully. The data were checked for normality, multi-collinearity, and missing value. Items internal consistency was determined through Cronbach Alpha = .832, indicating that survey items are closely intact with each other in logic and coherence. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis. The association between exposure to 'paranormal investigation shows through Pakistani television' and 'influence on paranormal beliefs of youth' of Lahore, was determined through the Chi-Square method at a 5 % level of significance. The current research undertakes that these ghost/paranormal shows influence paranormal beliefs among

youth. Moreover, this study is significant to investigate the intense influence (beliefs) of the youth consuming these targeted shows (i.e., *believing that ghosts can be captured on cameras, that ghosts can be detected by scientific tools, ghost can be heard or seen frequently with human eyes, places can be haunted, ghost can cause physical harm, they can possess people*). Along it this, this study finds behavioral changes among youth after consumption of targeted shows, (i.e., *youth avoids haunted places, old trees, abandoned places, and forests*).

This study seeks viewership patterns of youth towards these shows. The researchers divided the viewers (participants) into two categories i.e. heavy and light viewers. This study defines heavy viewer-who watch targeted programs daily, and light viewer-who rarely watch paranormal programs. For hypothesis testing, this study applies the cultivation theory (Resonance) in the context of the paranormal genre, as greater consumption of paranormal content via Pakistani television leads to the greater influence of paranormal belief. The notion of resonance in cultivation theory stated that if one has faced any event in real life, after consumption of the same thing in media, the beliefs of that person may be strong than the person who doesn't have any past experiences.

Analysis

The current research explores the influence of paranormal investigation shows on youth beliefs. The descriptive analysis was performed for screener and demographic variables, while to test the degree of relationship between variables statistical test was applied. From the different universities of Lahore, 630 students were surveyed. The data was taken from 315 boys and 315 girls from prominent universities in Lahore (Queen Mary College, Lahore College for Women University, National University of Modern

Languages, Punjab University, Kinnaird College and the University of Central Punjab. Among 630 participants half of the respondents were perusing arts and the other was perusing sciences degree as reported in Table 01. The study participants fall in the age range of 16 to 24 years.

Table 01: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Girls (315)	<u>157 Girls with Science Degree</u> 157 Girls with Arts Degree
Boys (315)	<u>157 Boys with Science Degree</u> 157 Boys with Arts Degree
Age	16-24

The study participants were asked six screening items to determine the participants' history of paranormal. The results indicated that 303(48.1%) participants don't have prior paranormal experience followed by having paranormal experience 242(38.4%), and not sure 85(13.5%). Whereas, only 205(32.5%) have such an unexplainable experience. The 234(37%) participants were a victim of black magic, and, 95(15.1%) had the experience to encounter ghosts. Moreover, there were 347(75.7%) participants who mostly prefers to watch ghost/ paranormal shows. The participants were asked about their intention to watch ghost/paranormal shows and the results indicated that 226(35.9%) screened these shows to kill time followed by excitement 171(27.1%), curiosity 165(26.2%), escape from reality 51(8.1%) and peer pressure 17(2.7%) respectively, shown in table 02.

Table 02: Screening items

	Yes	No	Not sure
-Paranormal experience	242 (38.4)	303 (48.1)	85 (13.5)
-Experienced something Unexplainable	205 (32.5)	319 (50.6)	106 (16.8)
-Victim of Black magic	234(37)	290(46.0)	106 (16.8)
-Encounter ghost	95 (15.1)	477 (75.7)	58 (9.2)
	Regularly	Usually	Rarely

-How often do you watch ghost shows	124 (19.7)	347 (55)	159 (25)	
Peer pressure	Excitement/ Thrill	Curiosity	Escape from reality	Kill time
1	171(27.1)	165 (26.2)	51(8.1)	22
7				6(35.9)
(2.7)				

The study participants were categorized to make comparisons between light and heavy viewers based on their paranormal beliefs due to ghost investigation shows. The results in table 03 indicated that the participant watching ghost shows had a high influence on paranormal beliefs. The youth, watching investigation shows greatly believe that places can be haunted, people can be possess by Jannat, Jannat can cause harm, Jannat can be heard, possible to capture them on cameras, the existence of black magic, communication with Jannat is possible, Jannat presence can be detected, can appear in human form, animal form and can control technology respectively. It shows that high screening of paranormal investigation shows higher acceptance to believe ghost's presence.

Table 03: Comparison of light and heavy viewers based on their paranormal believes

Sr	Statements	Heavy viewers	Light viewers
		Agree %	Agree %
1	Start believing in ghosts more after watching shows	42.27	20.13
2	Some places can be haunted	77.23	51.57
3	People can possess by Jannat	54.47	46.54
4	Jannat can harm human	69.91	65.41
5	Jannat can be heard	77.23	51.57
6	Jannat can be captured	46.35	19.50

7	Black magic exit	60.98	59.00
8	Communication with Jannat is possible	38.19	27.67
9	The presence of Jannat can be detected	49.59	23.27
10	Jannat can appear in human form	48.78	33.33
11	Jannat can appear in animal form	49.60	29.23
12	Jannat can control technology	49.59	28.30

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothetical relationship among variables was statistically analyzed to infer the influence of paranormal investigation shows. The chi-square test was applied to determine that a greater exposure to paranormal investigation shows on Pakistani television, has a greater influence on the beliefs of youth. The results shown in Table 04 indicated that $P=.000 < 0.05$, which means there is a significant difference exist between exposure to paranormal investigation shows and its influence on beliefs. The statistical results proved that there is an association between the consumption of paranormal investigation shows and their influence on youth beliefs. Table 03 findings also validate the hypothetical relationship between the said phenomenon.

Table 04

Relationship between ghost shows exposure and influence on beliefs of youth

Variables	Chi-Square	D F	P-Value	Conclusion
Relationship between exposure and influence (N=630)	169.165	94	.000	Significant

An Independent sample t-test was applied to determine the difference between the paranormal beliefs of those having personal paranormal experience and who have not. The results in Table 05 depicted that $P=0.000 < 0.05$, which means that a significant difference exists between those who experienced the paranormal in past and who don't have any paranormal experience. Furthermore, the descriptive finding of a statement (start believing in ghost more after watching shows) shown in table 03 made it clear that respondent who has personal experience with the paranormal, get more influenced (believes) from targeted programs.

Table05: Association between exposure and prior personal experience

Variables	Chi-Square	D-F	P-Value	Conclusion
paranormal experience	4.263	398	.000	Significant
No paranormal experience				

Note: To test the hypothesis, (resonance) researcher exclude the responses of light viewers, as a notion of resonance goes with heavy viewers only

Sub Hypothesis (A)

An Independent sample t-test was applied to test the difference between the paranormal beliefs of girls and boys watching paranormal investigation shows. The significance level $P=.002 < 0.05$, validates that girls take more influence on paranormal shows than boys.

Table5.1: Viewing paranormal investigation shows has more influence on beliefs of girls than boys

Independent T-Test for comparison of girls and boys influenced believes

Gender	T	DF	P-Value	Conclusion
Girl	3.162	628	.002	Significant
Boys				

N=630

Sub Hypothesis (B)

The difference between the paranormal beliefs of the student with a science degree and students with an arts degree was determined by applying an independent sample t-test. The results $P=.002 < 0.05$ shown in table 5.2 depicted that students of arts degree get more influence by paranormal investigation shows than the students of science degrees. The results proved that there is a significant difference exist between the paranormal beliefs of students with science degrees and students with an arts degree.

Table5.2: Influence on beliefs would be different for Arts and science degree students

T-Test for comparison of influenced beliefs on arts and science degree students

Degree	T	DF	P-Value	Conclusion
Arts Degree	3.332	628	.002	Significant
Science Degree				

The chi-square statistics were applied to determine the association between paranormal viewing and claiming to have a personal paranormal experience. The results in table 5.3 indicated that the results are significant $P=.000 < 0.05$, proving the association between paranormal viewing and claiming to have a personal paranormal experience. However, the descriptive statistical results made it clear that participants who were heavy viewers of targeted shows, claimed more to have personal paranormal experiences in past.

Sub Hypothesis (C)

Table5.3: Paranormal viewing and claiming to have a personal paranormal experience

Degree	Chi-Square	DF	P-Value	Conclusion
Association between exposure and paranormal encounter	19.36	2	.000	Significant

Discussion

The current study explored paranormal beliefs influencing youth behavior due to the consumption of paranormal investigation shows on Pakistani television channels. The results show that the majority of participants prefer to watch paranormal shows. To kill their free time, entertainment and curiosity were the three main intentions to watch these shows. These findings corroborate previous findings of [Gerbner, et.al \(2002\)](#) that people mostly tend to consume the horror genre for entertainment. [Halsey, \(2020\)](#) and [Ofcom, \(2005\)](#) stated that the media is using the paranormal phenomenon for entertainment, which means the purpose of media is fulfilling.

This result indicated a strong paranormal belief of youth consuming ghost shows on Pakistani channels. (See table 03). These results corroborate the findings of [\(Sparks et al., 1994; Sparks et al., 1998; Sparks et al., 2001; Brewer, 2013 and Spark, Nelson & Campbell, 1997\)](#) that the media role is highly influential to accelerate paranormal beliefs. The findings of [Brewer \(2012\)](#) also endorsed the strong impact of paranormal investigation shows to shape paranormal beliefs. Sparks, [Nelson & Campbell \(1997\)](#) reported a significant relationship between exposure to TV programs that featured paranormal content and paranormal beliefs. Moreover, the finding on high viewer consumption of paranormal shows validates the [Gerbner et al., \(2002\)](#) results that those who watch a lot of television (heavy viewers) are likely to be more influenced by television content. Thus 1st hypothesis of the study, *Greater exposure to paranormal investigation shows on Pakistani television, the Greater the influence on the beliefs of youth, is accepted.*

It is evident from results that females get more influence by targeted shows, and are more likely to express these beliefs (i.e., presence of ghosts, haunted places) as

compared to men, which is corroborated by the findings of (Gallup, 2005; Zia, 2007, Saprks & Miller, 2012 and Wolfradt, 1997). Moreover, it is found that art students get more influence by paranormal beliefs as compared to science students. These results validate the findings of (Abitov, et.al, 2018), that natural sciences students tend to less believes paranormal happenings (logic i.e. out of body experiences, reincarnation, and possibilities to contact with dead and spirits), while humanitarian students are more interested in myths, religious and philosophical underpinnings. These results are also consistent with the findings of Abbas (2013) claiming that scientific-minded people do not believe in the paranormal due to insufficient empirical data proving the existence of paranormal power. These results are also consistent with the study of Gary & Mill (1990) concluded a significant relationship between critical thinking and paranormal beliefs of students in sciences as they get trained to think critically. Farha & Stewart (2006) found that students in social science hold stronger paranormal beliefs than students in natural sciences. Contrary to these findings, Surmeli & Saka (2011) reported that there are no differences between the perception of natural sciences and social sciences students. The study results are evidence that consumption of targeted content leads to behavioral changes (i.e. getting afraid of old trees, avoiding haunted places, avoiding graveyards and avoiding outdoor activities at any particular time, wearing 'taweez (Mascots)' to be safe from supernatural entities). This consumption has a strong influence on participants having prior personal experience of any paranormal event. This result is consistent with the findings of Sparks & Miller, 2001; Farooq & Kayani, 2020; Wiseman, et.al. 2002, as prior an experience grater a paranormal belief. This finding is also consistent with the finding of Shrum and

Bischak (2001) that people whose life experiences resonate with the content of television will be more affected by television messages. The research finding of Gerbner et al., (2002) also validates the current study finding that having any personal experience likely to be a stronger believer after watching the same paranormal on screen. With a boosted cultivation effect. Thus, *the influence on beliefs are stronger for individuals, who have personal experience paranormal event in past* is accepted.

Conclusion

This research concludes that paranormal events screened in targeted shows seem giving birth to superstitious thinking among youngsters. The mass media should take responsibility as many people accept paranormal claims without logical thinking. The results indicated a statistically significant association between watching paranormal content and the influence on paranormal beliefs of youth in Pakistan. Moreover, the study findings shows that media has a direct effect not only to influence paranormal beliefs but also the behavior of youth to intensifying superstitious thinking among youngsters.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the same research should be conducted to investigate the paranormal beliefs of other locales in Pakistan. Future research should be conducted to investigate paranormal beliefs among religious and non-religious people watching paranormal investigation shows. The study tool should also be converted in the Urdu language to understand the paranormal beliefs of rural communities in Pakistan. A qualitative inquiry is recommended for more in-depth insights to generalize the investigating phenomenon.

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